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SUBJECT: Brazil: Foreign Policy as an Emerging Campaign Issue

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CLASSIFIED BY: Lisa Kubiske, Charge d'Affaires; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶11. (C) Summary. With both sides unwilling to promote distinctive alternatives to prevailing economic policy in a pre-election environment, Brazil's two principal rival parties - President Lula's Worker's Party (PT) and front-running presidential candidate Jose Serra's Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) - are increasingly eager to air their differences on foreign policy. Congressional voting and debate over issues such as Colombia-Venezuela, Honduras, and Iran have grown increasingly partisan, with coalition lines enforced. Strongly opinionated individual members, especially those who travel frequently to key countries, have proven more effective than party leaders or relevant committees in shaping the foreign policy debate. In the case of PT, this allows some of their most militant to shape priorities, as seen in PT's new foreign policy platform, tentatively approved in December. PT has addressed its lack of foreign policy outside of Lula by bolstering the credentials of presidential candidate Dilma Rousseff with recent visits to Copenhagen and Germany. PSDB and its allies, meanwhile, are staking out positions neither rightist nor isolationist - most heavily favor Brazil's stance on post-Kyoto negotiations in Copenhagen, for example - but wish to promote a Brazilian foreign policy more in line with traditional, pre-Lula approaches. As 2010 unfolds, the PT and the PSDB can be expected to continue ratcheting up the rhetoric on foreign policy, largely due to the need to find a way to distinguish their parties before the October elections.  
End summary.

The Emerging Issue?

¶12. (C) In separate late December discussions, federal deputy Bruno Araujo (PSDB-Pernambuco) and Valter Pomar, Director of PT's International Relations office, made the same basic point to poloff: foreign policy will be a bigger campaign issue in 2010 than in previous elections, and that their respective parties see it as advantageous to their side for it to be so. Neither is under illusion that the general public will much focus on foreign policy, and each conceded that they are pressing foreign policy matters for other reasons. Araujo, like other tucanos (members of PSDB), acknowledged that his party has become more aggressive on foreign policy in large part because it is not advantageous for them to oppose popular government economic initiatives like the Pre-Salt oil legislation. He further argued that voters, the media, and most rank-in-file diplomats at Itamaraty (Ministry of Foreign Relations) disagree with Brazil's recent adventurous tack in foreign policy.

¶13. (C) Pomar explained PT's desire to highlight Brazil's increasingly visible foreign policy as a means of communicating with the voter about what Brazil can become - a first-tier country. He said that keeping issues such as Honduras, the Middle East, and Copenhagen in the public sphere reinforces to the voter the image of a new Brazil, and that the debate with PSDB shows voters that the party of Lula and Dilma is the only real vehicle for achieving

that outcome. Other petista (PT member) voices, such as Dep. Emiliano Jose (PT-Bahia) made an argument mirroring that of PSDB's Araujo. "The economy is about negotiations and compromises....With the U.S. in Colombia...we will be militante." Colombia, he added, will not be the only issue where PT members will emphasize their differences with U.S. policy during this election year.

¶4. (C) Votes in Congress show the increasingly enforced divide and the more heated quality of the rhetoric. The December 18 Senate vote to approve Venezuela's accession to Mercosul, while expected, was carried out on a strict party line vote that did not reflect the privately held views of many senators. In comparison with a mid-October Mercosul vote count estimate provided to poloff by Sen. Arthur Virgilio (Amazonas), leader of the PSDB in Senate and a key opponent of Venezuela's accession, at least one-quarter of the senate - including several members from both sides - switched their projected vote by December due to pressure from each side's respective coalition leadership. Senate floor debate was unusually rancorous. (see ref A for more on Mercosul.) President Ahmadinejad's November visit brought a similarly heated response, with hours of pointed speeches on both sides. The vast majority of activists in these debates are tucanos and petistas, with PSDB's coalition partners DEM and PPS also playing a visible role. The Brazilian Democratic Movement party (PMDB), PT's primary coalition partner in the government, only sometimes joins the debate - strongly aligned with Lula on Mercosul but much more distanced on Iran and Honduras. The many small center-right parties within Lula's governing coalition are conspicuously silent on foreign

policy.

Travels to the Andes, Honduras, Sudan

¶5. (SBU) Given the weak role of Brazil's Congress in foreign policy, with limited budget-shaping ability and oversight of MRE, activist individual members play a large role in shaping party positions and debate. Members with acknowledged foreign policy expertise who travel frequently, such as Dep. Raul Jungmann (PPS-PE), become more influential than committee chairmen - to the extent that Foreign Affairs Committee and both Senate and Chamber presidency staff have complained to poloff recently that Congress has lost institutional control over its ever-expanding number of CODELs that purport to speak for the GOB. Trips over the last two months that received media coverage include Honduras, the Andean region, Egypt, and Sudan, in addition to the 40-member congressional delegation in Copenhagen in December. In some cases, bipartisan delegations work well together. PSDB's Araujo and Dep. Mauricio Rands (PT-PE), both members of the October delegation to Honduras organized by Jungmann, told us enthusiastically that, despite differences of opinion, the mission focused successfully on the single goal of protecting the Brazilian Embassy housing deposed president Manuel Zelaya (ref C).

¶6. (C) Other delegations become more politicized. Jungmann's mid-November delegation to Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador - which included visits with Colombian President Uribe and Ecuadorian President Correa - revealed sharp differences among participants. Jungmann, per his post-visit conversations with Recife Principal Officer and Brasilia poloff, expressed concern that low-level armed conflict between Colombia and Venezuela was now quite likely. He did not see the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) as a contributing factor in regional instability or as any particular novelty. In contrast, the PT member in the delegation, Dep. Emiliano Jose (Bahia), returned making speeches claiming that the USG is building seven new army bases in Colombia, and that the U.S. is planning to build up troop size in order to carry out missions in neighboring countries. Another PT Deputy, Nilson Mourao (Acre), traveled to Sudan in September at GOS expense and returned issuing a spirited defense of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, including a sharp rejection of the international community's approach to Sudan.

PT: The Militant View

¶7. (C) Hardliners such as Jose and Mourao play a strong role in PT's public foreign policy because the party counts few among its ranks who have training or natural interest in the area. Their

historical distrust of the United States can make communication difficult. Early December conversations between poloff and Dep. Emiliiano Jose and Dep. Jose Genoino (PT-Sao Paulo) bogged down into extended discussions about a U.S. Air Force budget document, which they were convinced was a mistakenly released confidential document that proved U.S. intentions to carry out military operations against neighboring governments. While it seemed that we made progress clarifying the nature of the document and the DCA in general, it was equally clear that the PT deputies did not want to be convinced. As Jose put it, "PT has its own vision of South America, which is against the presence of the U.S. military. That will not change." In early December, Jose and Genoino successfully pushed for language in PT's draft international policy platform chastising the U.S. for its "military buildup" and "new U.S. bases" in Colombia. (Comment: While PT leaders had been previously briefed on the real nature of the U.S.-Colombia DCA, the message has not been relayed down the ranks and the perceived advantages during an election year of a public stand against an American presence in the region make such a position irresistible. End Comment)

18. (C) There are some checks within PT against such hard-liner inaccuracies. The PT International Relations office went out of its way to tell us that Mourao's glowing report in support of the Sudanese government represented neither PT nor GOB positions, and that Mourao was told to quiet down. PT staff and party moderates also softened and/or removed language in the draft international platform that directly criticized the U.S. position in Honduras and the Middle East. The PT nevertheless promotes Mourao as its "Middle East expert," despite his strong biases and evident lack of understanding of the basics of the region. He helped organize schedules for the November Ahmadinejad and Abbas visits, and, according to several sources, is the party's designated interlocutor with all embassies from the region except Israel's. (It bears noting that Foreign Minister Celso Amorim officially affiliated with PT in September and has taken an increasingly active interest in the region, to be reported septel.) There are no signs that PT has anyone else available to work Middle East issues.

19. (C) As the 2010 elections approach, the PT will find itself under pressure to keep such party hardliners out of view as it tries to sell presidential candidate Dilma Rousseff as the leader of an emerging, optimistic, internationalist Brazil. Rousseff was heavily advertised as the point person for the Brazilian delegation at the COP-15 Climate Change Conference. She also accompanied Lula to Germany before Copenhagen. Rousseff surprised by making statements in Germany to the effect that GOB recognition of the November 29 Honduran elections will have to be reconsidered down the line. As reported in ref B, Lula also went out of his way to contrive a prominent Rousseff role in Rio's successful 2016 Olympic bid. PT contacts view Rousseff's international travel not only as a means of bolstering her foreign policy credentials - which they admit are weak - but also as a way of communicating to the voter that Brazil will continue to be a bold emerging player on the international scene. The PT is convinced the voters want this even if they don't know all the details; Pomar described it in terms of projecting the optimism of the PT against the cautious pessimism of the PSDB. In a pre-Copenhagen meeting with poloff, Dep. Rands (PT) defended the idea that Brazil could cut projected CO2 emissions 39 percent by 2020, but also said the emissions goal was set with the image of Brazil and Rousseff squarely in mind.

The Opposition: Traditionalist, not Center-Right

110. (C) The PSDB and its fellow opposition members sense opportunity vis-C -vis the PT, but it would be inaccurate to categorize their international approach as right-of-center or deferential to U.S. positions. Dep. Jungmann (PPS) and Dep. Araujo (PSDB) both expressed strong support for Brazil's new position on climate change negotiations. The PSDB and PPS voted nearly in bloc to support the domestic legislation, signed into law by Lula on December 22, committing Brazil to make the emissions cuts that form the basis of its Copenhagen proposal. DEM, the most rightward of Brazil's major parties, expressed greater reservations, but Dep. Ronaldo Caiado (Goias), the party's leader in the Chamber, told poloff during the COP-15 negotiations that DEM would not oppose any agreement reached in Copenhagen. Jungmann anticipates that a

prospective Serra administration would still be in conflict with the U.S. on some issues, with distinctions on trade, energy and ethanol assuming a higher profile while disagreements on Middle East and Latin America recede. The PSDB and PPS also have exhibited strong socially liberal streaks in their foreign policy statements, frequently criticizing Iran and other authoritarian governments for their positions on gay rights, abortion, and other issues that the PT is reluctant to address even domestically.

¶11. (C) The opposition is working to project a foreign policy that, in the words of the policy advisor to Sen. Joao Tenorio (PSDB-Alagoas), is "both liberal and traditional." Some tucano contacts, such as Araujo, emphasize the traditional. In his view, PSDB should campaign to show that a Serra win will move Brazil back to its pre-2002 foreign policy stances, especially on Latin America. He viewed PSDB's bloc vote against Venezuela's Mercosul accession as a primary case in point. Others, including Jungmann and Tenorio's advisor, are careful to emphasize the "liberal," acknowledging that PT has a point when it says that Brazilians enjoy seeing their government take an active role in international affairs because it speaks well of the country. In their view, promoting democracy and conflict resolution abroad and taking an aggressive stand on climate change are winning issues domestically, if carried out properly. The opposition's challenge will be to expose the poor decisions and unhealthy alliances developed by Lula and the PT in Honduras, Iran and elsewhere, in order to develop maximum advantage for Serra in the campaign.

Comment: How Important is This?

¶12. (C) It is questionable whether foreign policy will have a meaningful impact on public opinion and the election season. The PT's Pomar correlated the spike in Lula's activity on international issues with his subsequent recent rise in the polls while the PSDB's Araujo argued that the party's position on Iran helped turned the media against Lula and the PT. Both may be right, but there's no evidence that the voters who decide elections care much about Ahmadinejad, Zelaya and the like. In any case, all parties have to define themselves against their opposition in some fashion, and all indicators suggest that foreign policy will be the easiest way to do so. This is especially true for the PSDB, which is reluctant to discuss economic issues given the electorate's discomfort with Brazil's economic performance under former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Meanwhile, as distinctive foreign policy positions solidify over the next year, the stage will be set for either Dilma Rousseff or Jose Serra to take the next administration's foreign policy in substantively very different directions. End comment.

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